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## Letter dated 16 May 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to convey to you the attached information entitled "Water resources are the basis for sustainable development and progress" on the measures taken by the Republic of Uzbekistan to ensure the rational use of water resources of Central Asia, and on the International Conference on the theme "Towards the Sixth World Water Forum — Joint Action Towards Water Security", which was held in Tashkent on 12 and 13 May 2011, with the support of the World Water Council, in the framework of the global process of preparation for the forthcoming World Water Forum to be held in Marseille, France, in March 2012 (see annex).

I would highly appreciate it if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 20.

(*Signed*) Murad **Askarov**
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## Annex to the letter dated 16 May 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

## Water resources: the basis for sustainable development and future progress

On 12 and 13 May 2011 an international conference entitled "Towards the Sixth World Water Forum — cooperative actions for water security" was held in Tashkent, with support from the World Water Council, as part of the global preparatory process for the Forum, to be held in Marseilles, France, in March 2012.

Preserving the environment and its resources, of which water is one of the most important, has in recent years become a matter of increasing urgency. Addressing the issue of water supply for the population and the economy is a matter of concern to the entire international community. Currently, according to official data, over 1 billion people worldwide lack access to clean water. This situation may become even more critical in the future, as continued population growth and climate change make the shortage of water resources even more acute.

The entire world is aware of the environmental problems facing Central Asia as a result of the desiccation of the Aral Sea. However, there are those who have failed to learn from that painful experience. Attempts to build huge dams on transboundary rivers and to convert existing and future hydroengineering complexes to energy production are justifiably alarming to the vast majority of the region's population. The negative effects of such actions will have an impact on the lives of millions of people living in the area; what is more, that impact is already becoming global in nature. President Islam Karimov of the Republic of Uzbekistan placed particular emphasis on this in his statement at the United Nations Millennium Summit follow-up meeting in September 2010.

The international conference in Tashkent, which marked an important stage in the preparations for the World Water Forum, was attended by more than 350 experts, prominent scientists, environmentalists and water management specialists from 32 countries, as well as representatives of some 30 influential international organizations and financial institutions, including the United Nations and its agencies, the World Water Council, the Global Water Partnership, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Economic Commission for Europe, the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage, the International Commission on Large Dams and other bodies.

In his address to the conference participants, President Karimov set forth the main approaches Uzbekistan is taking to regional issues concerning the rational use of the water resources of the region's transboundary rivers, which have always met the vital needs and requirements of the more than 50 million people living in the six countries of the region. The President called on the conference participants to establish an effective regional cooperation mechanism to guarantee that the use of transboundary river water conforms to universally accepted international standards

and rules to ensure equality, mutual benefit and fairness for all parties, as this particular issue is taking on tremendous significance for the region's inhabitants.

President Karimov stressed that "today humanity faces an important task: that of preserving nature for present and future generations, protecting it from threats and challenges that could worsen people's living conditions and destroy the current environmental management system". He has noted repeatedly, in statements at numerous international summits, that the era of wasteful attitudes towards nature's bounty is over, urging the international community to pool its efforts to protect the environment, including by addressing the consequences of the Aral Sea environmental crisis. In his address to the conference attendees in Tashkent, he emphasized once again that the issue of rational and fair use of water resources in the region is becoming crucially important.

In Uzbekistan, a great deal of attention is being paid to the widespread introduction of integrated water resources management (IWRM). Irrigation networks are being updated, water accounting is being enhanced and active outreach efforts are being made with industries and the public, involving economic incentives for water conservation. These initiatives are an essential part of the large-scale integrated reforms carried out in the country since its first years of independence, for the sake of the well-being of present and future generations. Foreign experts at the conference called Uzbekistan a leader in the rational and prudent use of natural resources and in the adoption of an effective, gradual and consistent approach to economic and social development.

Issues discussed at the conference are on the agenda of the Sixth World Water Forum, the theme of which is "Time for Solutions". At the Tashkent conference, round-table discussions were held on each of the priorities that reflect pressing issues of water resource conservation and use for the Central Asian region. In addition to the plenary sessions, the conference schedule included seven such round-table discussions on key topics of particular urgency for the Central Asian region. Two of them, "Guaranteeing water for future generations" and "Ensuring sustainable drinking water supply", were held on the first day of the conference.

In his video address to conference attendees, the President of the World Water Council, Mr. Loïc Fauchon, said that the time of "easy" water was over and that humanity had entered a new era of shared water use. He noted a shift to a more respectful conception of nature. Thanks to the efforts of several countries, including those of Central Asia, the groundwork was being laid for a more responsible attitude towards water resources and their rational joint use. The United Nations had proclaimed the right of every person to water, and no one could deprive anyone of that right, which was necessary for life. Water should be shared fairly among countries, people and nature. The peoples of Central Asia had a very rich water culture, and their experience was highly important for addressing water problems the world over.

The World Water Forums, the largest international gatherings focusing on the condition, conservation and use of the Earth's water resources, have been held every three years since 1997. The theme of the Sixth World Water Forum, to be held in 2012, is "Time for Solutions". Of the 12 key priorities on the agenda, 6 have been identified as the most significant for the Central Asian region: guaranteeing access to water for all and right to water; contributing to cooperation and peace through water; balancing multiple uses through IWRM; contributing to food security by

optimal use of water; improving the quality of water resources and ecosystems; and responding to climate and global changes in an urbanizing world. Priorities for the Central Asian region include organizing the management of transboundary bodies of water on the basis of international law, widespread adoption of IWRM and reform of agriculture, including irrigation, on that basis.

The Head of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, Mr. Miroslav Jenca, said that two transboundary rivers in Central Asia, the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya, had historically provided a basis for the hydrological, social and economic development of the peoples living in the region, making it possible to achieve the goals identified in the Millennium Declaration. Thus, an efficient and rational approach was needed, as were a responsible attitude and joint actions in the framework of regional cooperation on water resources management and conservation. The United Nations continued to promote efforts by the countries of the region to seek a negotiated solution to the problems of the Aral Sea Basin and to develop a mutually acceptable mechanism for the integrated use of its water resources, taking into account the interests of all the States of Central Asia. United Nations legal instruments provided a solid framework for resolving those problems, but the situation with regard to water and energy resources management in the region nonetheless remained very complex.

Since the early years of the country's independence, an enormous amount of attention has been focused on improving environmental protection, public health and the ecological situation, not only in Uzbekistan but throughout the Central Asian region, including the improvement of water resources management and the encouragement of water conservation. This has become one of the most important areas of State social policy in Uzbekistan, where reforms are carried out in an integrated, gradual and consistent fashion. The macroeconomic and social stability, steady economic growth and increased individual income which Uzbekistan enjoys are the striking results of this policy.

National environmental protection legislation fully in keeping with international norms has been developed in Uzbekistan and is being enhanced. Targeted State programmes and national action plans are being carried out. The Republic of Uzbekistan has acceded to all the major international environmental protection and sustainable development instruments, including the 1992 United Nations Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and other international legal instruments concerning the use of transboundary water resources.

The Aral Sea environmental disaster has become well known all over the world, primarily because of Uzbekistan's response policy. In his statements at many high-level international forums, the President of Uzbekistan has repeatedly drawn world attention to the need to adopt comprehensive measures in that regard, with the involvement of the international community. At his initiative, a number of declarations have been signed, the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea was founded and major international conferences on this topic have been held, including one entitled "Transboundary environmental problems in Central Asia: the use of international legal mechanisms to solve them", held in November 2010. The outcome document adopted at that conference was the Tashkent Ecological Declaration, which says that the States of the region should strive for transboundary cooperation in accordance with the key international legal instruments setting out

the main principles regarding the use of transboundary watercourses, so as to avoid harm to other States in the same river basin.

It was Uzbekistan that initiated the drafting and implementation of the plan of action to provide assistance to the Aral Sea Basin region in the framework of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea. Two phases of the plan have already been carried out. At the April 2009 meeting of Heads of State and founders of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, President Islam Karimov proposed a framework for the third phase of this programme, to be carried out between 2011 and 2015.

Participants in the conference "Towards the Sixth World Water Forum — cooperative actions for water security" noted the enormous amount of work being done in Uzbekistan on the conservation and efficient use of water resources. As part of the large-scale agricultural reforms being implemented in the country, water user associations have been formed and the cotton crop has been significantly reduced, so that it now occupies only about 25 per cent of the country's irrigated acreage. Despite the intensive development of the national economy, the amount of water being drawn from rivers has declined, falling from 63 to 52 cubic kilometres since the 1990s. In recent years more than $1 billion has been spent on land improvement and reclamation, resulting in the improvement of almost 740,000 hectares of irrigated land with rebuilt and cleaned collection and drainage systems, land grading and the purchase of essential technology. The most up-to-date approaches to solving water shortage problems, including integrated water resources management, have been widely introduced in Uzbekistan. For example, as a result of only one such project, overall water use in the South Ferghana Canal system dropped by more than 20 per cent. Today integrated water resources management is being implemented over more than 250,000 hectares of irrigated land.

The Central Asian nations have since ancient times appreciated water as the source of life, according to Dmitry Kozlov, Rector of Moscow State University of Environmental Engineering. Uzbekistan's experience in the field of land reclamation, water conservation and water management is being studied and used successfully in many countries around the world. On behalf of the Eastern European-Caucasus-Central Asia Network of Basin Organizations, Mr. Kozlov thanked President Islam Karimov for his consistent attention to environmental issues and his well-thought-out and considered policies aimed at resolving the complex situation in the region concerning the use of transboundary river water resources.

The holding of the conference in Tashkent with the participation of all stakeholders was important for identifying effective, concrete solutions in the area of cooperative water use, in the view of Jean-François Donzier of France, the regional coordinator of the European regional preparatory process for the World Water Forum and the Permanent Technical Secretary of the International Network of Basin Organizations. There were serious water supply problems in Central Asia, he said, and it was encouraging that the work of tackling such problems was proceeding with complete transparency.

In their statements the foreign experts particularly emphasized that even the major efforts of one Government, Uzbekistan, were not sufficient to solve the problem of the conservation and efficient use of Central Asia's limited water resources. It was essential to take an integrated approach that considered the

interests of all the countries and peoples in the region. Uzbekistan was demonstrating such an approach.

In that context it was noted that the ambitions of certain countries located further upstream along the chief rivers of the region, the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya, to exploit the transboundary water resources in violation of current international standards was a matter of great concern. It was stressed that issues of fair water use in Central Asia had resonated widely in the international community. Attempts to implement projects upstream by building large hydropower facilities, with enormous dams, could inflict irreparable damage on the region's entire ecosystem and create a man-made social, ecological and humanitarian disaster. Those projects were drafted more than 40 years ago and are technologically long out of date. The chief problem, however, is that they do not take into account the high seismicity of the site of the forthcoming construction, which can reach 8 or 9 points; over the past 110 years there have been more than 20 major earthquakes in this area. For example, the dam envisaged at the Rogun hydroelectric power station in Tajikistan would be the highest in the world at 335 metres. Its construction could provoke a powerful earthquake that would pose an enormous danger to human life.

Moreover, as estimates by independent experts have shown, in the event of a breach in the dam, up to 1.5 million hectares of land would be flooded, along with more than 700 communities in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, home to about 5 million people. With the conversion of the Rogun reservoir to energy production, water shortages in the growing season would increase on average by more than 22 per cent, and could almost double in particularly dry years. This will lead to droughts, creating large expanses of desert, and to the flooding of arable land and local communities in winter. It was emphasized at the conference that this is how such projects can breed new ecological disasters on a far worse scale than the Aral Sea crisis.

In Uzbekistan's view it is essential that a compulsory and independent environmental and technical assessment of such projects be conducted by international experts, in order to establish clearly whether they are in compliance with international legal principles and standards on the use of transboundary watercourses and to identify all possible negative consequences their implementation may have for the population, the economy and the environment of all the countries situated in those river basins.

In the course of an open and constructive dialogue, the conference participants discussed in detail the regional issues related to the guaranteed and sustainable supply of water for all areas of human activity and the environment, taking into consideration climate changes and the negative impact of anthropogenic action on the basin between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers. A final resolution was adopted as a result of these discussions. It notes that the participants reached agreement as to which of the issues on the agenda of the Sixth World Water Forum are of highest priority for the region.

The conference participants recognized the need for every country in the region to adopt and faithfully comply with the standards and principles of international water law, under which transboundary river water in the territory of any State of the region should be used in a way that does no harm to other riparian States. In addition, hydropower structures may be built on transboundary rivers only

if the conclusions of independent international assessments are favourable and if the downstream States give their consent.

The resolution emphasizes the importance of strengthening cooperation among States in the region, with the goal of improving the effectiveness of the joint management and use of transboundary water resources and water management infrastructure, while enhancing the sustainability of the water supply and introducing innovative technologies.

In their final resolution, the conference participants call on the international community and the participants in the Sixth World Water Forum to help promote the principles of sustainable growth and ecological balance in the Central Asian region.